

Juvenile Justice System Reform in Luzerne County

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What ideal characteristics (procedures, practices, policies, etc.) could make the greatest difference to the future of the juvenile justice system in Luzerne County?

- Juvenile trials should be conducted to support families and juveniles.
 - Defendants should be able to speak at their trial.
 - The direction of the trial should not be based on the judges' moods.
 - There should be oversight and rules regarding sentencing.
 - The punishment should 'fit the crime'.
 - There should be a panel overseeing each case, not just one judge.
 - The juvenile justice system should take a look at the adult procedures where you are innocent until proven guilty.
 - Parents' voices should be a large part of the information presented at the trial.
- The whole system needs to be accountable, starting from probation officers to residential staff. No where along the process are families positively involved. Families should not have the feeling that everyone is hostile towards them. It should be a partnership aimed at helping juveniles.
- The whole process, from arrest to trial and placement, should not be done in isolation from the families of the children/adolescents.
 - Parents are not always told when their child is arrested. Parents may not be notified for a few days and they have no idea where their child is.
 - Parents should have immediate access to their child after their arrest.
 - Process should support the parents instead of traumatizing them.
 - Children/adolescents should never be questioned without their family or another adult family representative present.
- Children/adolescents need to be immediately evaluated for literacy. Children/adolescents should not be told to write apology letters and fill out forms which they can not read.
- Probation officers, police, judges, and institutional staff working with juveniles should have mandatory training on developmental and learning disabilities. All children/adolescents are not equal in their ability to understand verbal and written directions, and to read and/or write.
- Children/adolescents need to have a court appointed adult who helps them through the process and updates the parents as to what is happening.
- Trauma evaluations need to be completed on every child/adolescent and included in discussions, reports, and planning throughout the juvenile justice process.
- The juvenile justice and the education systems are very much intertwined, and both systems need to be totally reevaluated in reference to schools and as to how schools have kids arrested. Many children/adolescents are not receiving the correct educational programming leaving the children/adolescents to become frustrated and resulting in behavior problems. Many families feel that they and their children are 'belittled' by schools, with the education system never being held accountable.
- Children and families' rights should be posted on walls and corridors in the courtroom.

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